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A History of  
Western Europe  
A.D. 1—455

By M. CARY



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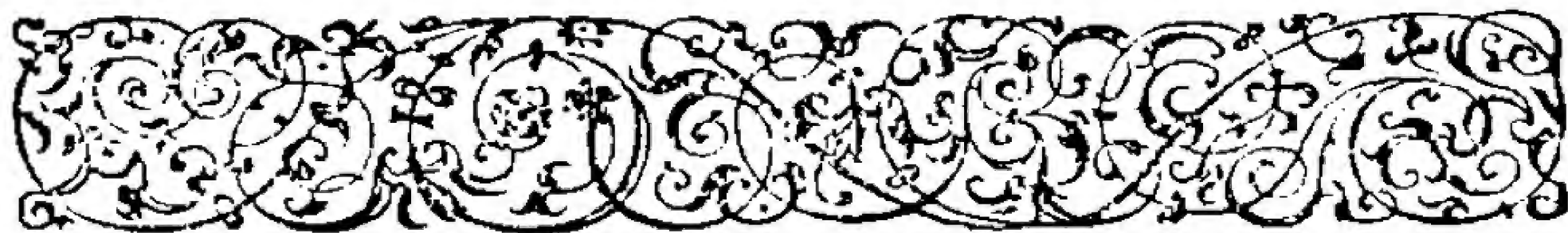
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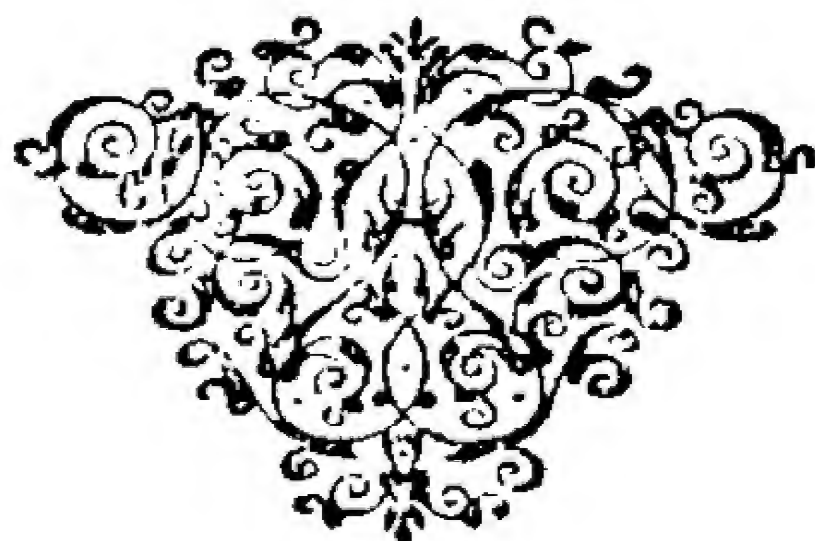
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A  
HISTORY OF WESTERN  
EUROPE, A.D. 1-455

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## INTRODUCTION

DURING the first four or five centuries of the Christian era the history of Western Europe makes up into an unusually simple and straightforward tale. At the time in question all those countries of Western Europe whose history is known at all—*i.e.*, the Spanish peninsula, France, Switzerland, Belgium, the Rhineland, and Britain, were included in the Roman Empire. As parts of that empire they had no independent political history and engaged in no separate alliances or wars. But this is not all. The Roman Empire was not a mere police-state; over and above its primary function of maintaining law and order it was engaged in the diffusion of Roman civilisation, and in this work it nowhere succeeded better than in Western Europe. In consequence of this process of romanisation Western Europe at this stage of its history presents more uniform features than ever before or after. Previous to the Roman conquest it consisted of a congeries of peoples with different languages and customs and several distinct histories; after the break-up of the Roman Empire it fell once more into a state of political and cultural chaos, from which it has not yet wholly emerged. Within the period of Roman rule Western Europe forms to all intents and purposes one large nation, sharing a common political and economic life, a common language and literature, art and religion.

For the purpose of the present volume, therefore, the history of Western Europe has no need to be split up into



so many separate regional histories. The most suitable division will be into two equal periods of time, the former extending from A.D. 1 to 235, the latter from A.D. 235 to 455. The fundamental difference between these spans of time is that the earlier one is essentially an age of stability, the latter an age of transition. In the former period the Roman Empire is in process of consolidation, in the latter it gradually breaks up.

Roman Britain, which forms the subject of another volume in this Series (No. 4), will only be considered here in relation to the main current of Roman history. Two other topics which are related to the history of Western Europe, but require separate treatment, Latin Literature and the early Christian Church, will likewise be mentioned more briefly here than their intrinsic importance might suggest.

# A HISTORY OF WESTERN EUROPE

## CHAPTER I

### *THE ROMAN FRONTIER DEFENCE*

THE Roman Empire was the result of a process of conquest which began some 400 years before the Christian era and continued into the second century A.D. Yet it might be said of this empire, as of the British Empire, that it was acquired "in a fit of absent-mindedness." Though the Romans from time to time committed breaches of international morality and of the rules of war as then understood, it cannot be said that they pursued a systematically aggressive policy. Their historians could plausibly claim that Roman wars, as a rule, had been fought in defence of the city or of the common peace of the Mediterranean; and modern writers on the same subject at least admit that the Romans groped their way to world-power rather than hurled themselves upon it. Moreover, about the beginning of the Christian era Roman foreign policy underwent a remarkable change. Until then it had been essentially opportunistic, henceforward it was based on a clear and consistent principle. Rome deliberately broke off her career of conquest and contented herself with holding her past gains. This new rule originated with the Emperor Augustus, and was



perhaps his most notable contribution to Roman statesmanship. In framing it Augustus was scarcely influenced by cosmopolitan or humanitarian sentiment. But he realised that the Roman Empire had reached that important turning-point at which warfare would cease to pay, for it had already absorbed those peoples who owned large stocks of transferable wealth and could thus be made to pay for the costs of their conquest. As a sound financier he set his face against a ruinous policy of further expansion. Besides, after the wars which occupied the earlier part of his reign and extended Roman rule to the Danube, he discovered that the existing frontiers of the Roman Empire were as strong as Nature could provide, and enclosed an area of countries grouped round the Mediterranean Sea which was in itself a natural geographic unit. Augustus therefore inserted into his political testament an admonition to future emperors to eschew further conquests, and his successors for the most part were content to obey.

It is true that the rule laid down by Augustus suffered some exceptions, and in Western Europe a few more wars of expansion were waged. Augustus himself for some years entertained the idea of conquering Germany as far as the Elbe. In support of this policy it could be argued that a line running from the mouth of the Elbe to Bohemia, and from that point to the bend of the Danube below Vienna, would be shorter than the two converging lines of the Rhine and Upper Danube. But a defeat which his forces sustained in the jungles of Northern Germany (A.D. 9), though nothing more than an incident in a generally successful war, sufficed to spoil the emperor's stomach for further fighting, and his

scheme of conquest in Germany was incontinently abandoned. In the second century A.D. an extension of the Roman frontier from the Lower Danube to the Carpathians, which was undertaken by the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 105), raised the question of a corresponding advance to the line of the Elbe. But no further move was prepared until the last days of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 180), and his death made an end for the time being to a policy of fresh annexations. In A.D. 234-235 a general named Maximinus, as the result of a successful retaliatory raid across the Rhine, resumed the plan of pushing the frontier forward to the Elbe, but his project, like that of Marcus Aurelius, died with him shortly after. In connection with the scheme of frontier fortifications which we shall presently consider, various Roman emperors of the first three centuries slightly encroached on the farther banks of the Rhine and Upper Danube, but in so doing they were strengthening rather than abandoning the existing boundary line.

While the German frontier was thus being stabilised, a notable extension of Roman territory was made across the Channel. In A.D. 43 the Emperor Claudius revived the scheme of conquering Britain, which Julius Cæsar had formed but Augustus renounced on the ground of its costliness. The reasons for this reversal of policy, and the story of the actual conquest, will be found in the companion volume on Roman Britain. Suffice it here to say that by A.D. 84 the Romans had advanced to the foot of the Grampians, that during the greater part of the next century they occupied the Scottish lowlands, and that in A.D. 211 they finally chose the line of the Tyne and the Solway for their boundary.



In selecting their frontiers the early Roman emperors were guided by a geographical principle. In the words of Augustus, "the empire should be kept within the bounds of ocean, desert, and distant rivers." On their sea front the only countries which the Romans could possibly regard as a menace were the British Isles. Of these, Britain was soon made safe by annexation; Ireland was left severely alone, and repaid this neglect by prolonged non-interference in Roman affairs. On the Continent the advantage of the river boundary lay not so much in the difficulty which invaders would have in crossing the water, as in the ease with which the defenders could patrol it laterally with the help of their ships and their frontier roads. On the farther banks of the Rhine and the Danube the Romans contented themselves at first with maintaining a glacis of uninhabited land and a few outposts across the Middle Rhine in the Taunus district, among them Wiesbaden. But Vespasian (c. A.D. 75) cut off the re-entrant angle near Basel by annexing the triangle between the Rhine, Danube, and Upper Neckar. Shortly afterwards Domitian traced out a new advance line along the Taunus watershed and the Main valley, and so to the Upper Danube, and defended it with a double series of forts, of which the now reconstructed Saalburg (in the Taunus) may serve as a specimen. About A.D. 125 Hadrian further strengthened this line, and marked it off as a definitive frontier by means of a continuous palisade. Nevertheless, his successor, Antoninus Pius, threw out a row of forts to the east of the Neckar and the north of the Upper Danube, and soon after A.D. 200 these were connected with a continuous stone wall (on the Danube sector) or a palisade and

ditch (along the Neckar sector). But the forts were mere outposts, and the barrier chiefly served as a customs frontier. The main line of defence always lay along the rivers, and all the larger Roman camps were situated on the left bank of the Rhine. The headquarters were at Mainz and at Birten (*Castra Vetera*, near Cleve); other large stations were at Neuss, Bonn, Strasbourg, and Windisch (on the Aar). These camps served as bases for field operations rather than as obstacles to invasion, for the Roman army of the first two centuries A.D. was essentially a mobile force which put its trust in its arms and legs, not in bricks and mortar.

The Roman army in the western half of the empire had a regular establishment of about 120,000 men. Originally two-thirds of this force were stationed along the Rhine and Upper Danube; after the conquest of Britain, which received a standing garrison of 30,000 men, the army on the German sector was reduced to 60,000. Outside the frontier zone the number of regular troops was extraordinarily small. In Spain Augustus had left a force of 30,000 men, whose main object was to watch the still unruly tribes of the north-west. By A.D. 100 it was found safe to reduce this garrison to 10,000. In Italy the imperial guards ("*prætorix cohortes*"), 10,000 strong, served to defend the emperor rather than the empire. In the interior of Gaul the only standing force was a police battalion at Lyon.

In the days of the great conquests the Roman army had been recruited exclusively from Italy; but from the time of Augustus it was found necessary to draw upon the outlying peoples as well, and by A.D. 100 these were supplying almost the whole of the forces. The western



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populations in particular—Gauls, Spaniards, and Britons—enlisted readily in Rome's service. At first the various units changed their quarters not infrequently, and some emperors made a point of removing recruits from their native districts; in Britain the garrison contained details from Spain, the Danube lands, and even Syria. Eventually, however, the greater convenience of local recruitment asserted itself, and by the third century the Roman army was changing into a territorial force.

Almost to the end of Roman history the flower of the army consisted of infantrymen. Of these one half were enrolled in the "legions"—*i.e.*, permanent regiments of 5,000 to 6,000 men equipped with a heavy javelin, a stabbing sword, a large semi-cylindrical shield, and a moderate amount of body armour. The so-called "auxiliaries," who were largely drawn from the regions on the outskirts of the empire, served in smaller units and usually carried a lighter armament. The cavalry, which had been strangely neglected under the Republic, received more attention in the period of the emperors, but in the first two centuries A.D. its functions remained subordinate. The Roman artillery pieces, which were discharged by the sudden release of a twisted rope, could propel heavy stones or armour-piercing arrows over an effective range of about a quarter-mile. But they had too slow a rate of fire to be of service in the field.

The Roman navy consisted wholly of cruisers and transports. Two of its squadrons, stationed at Misenum (near Naples) and at Forum Iulii (Fréjus, near Toulon), policed the Western Mediterranean; another with its headquarters at Boulogne protected the North Atlantic



THE ROMAN FRONTIER DEFENCE II  
coasts against pirates. The flotilla on the Rhine was chiefly used for transport.

The strength of the Roman army lay above all in its rigorous training. Originally a conscript militia, it had in the last century B.C. been converted into a professional force. From the time of Augustus the term of enlistment was fixed at sixteen, twenty, or even twenty-five years. The same emperor made careful provision for the regular payment of the troops, which was on a fairly liberal scale, and for their pensions (in money or land). Hence, although the right of conscription was never renounced, in normal times voluntary enlistment sufficed to fill the gaps. Under the earlier Roman emperors the officer corps was not yet completely professionalised, but tended more and more to become so. Its backbone was furnished by the centurions, who doubled the part of drill sergeant and of company commander. These were mostly men of proved merit and great experience, who had gained promotion from the rank and file. Between battles the Roman soldiers were inured to remorseless labour in marching and digging; in battle they were adepts at combined operations and could equally well skirmish or employ shock tactics. From time to time, of course, individual units were caught napping by enemy raiders, and during occasional spells of civil war the frontiers were seriously endangered. But on the whole the army of the earlier Roman emperors was a remarkably efficient instrument of defence. The great development which Europe underwent at the beginning of the Christian era was in no small measure due to the almost unbroken security which the Roman soldiers maintained on its behalf.

## CHAPTER II

*ROMAN ADMINISTRATION*

THE system by which the Roman Empire was governed at the beginning of the Christian era was largely the outcome of the great conquests of the preceding century, which exercised a revolutionary effect upon the Roman constitution. At the time of these conquests Rome was a republic of an aristocratic type. Political power resided in a hierarchy of annual magistrates and in a Senate, or Council of State, of ex-magistrates holding their seats for life. For some time this constitution worked well; but eventually the Senate fell into the hands of an exclusive coterie of indifferent ability, and its authority was finally overthrown by a new and unconstitutional power. By 100 B.C. experience had shown that the Roman conquests, though acquired in the first instance by conscripts, could only be maintained by standing forces, and the army was accordingly converted into a professional body. This new model army, as we have seen in Chapter I., proved itself an efficient bulwark of empire, but in domestic politics it at once became, and ever tended to remain, a subversive force. Its loyalty was given, not to the Senate and people, but to the generals who recruited and paid it, and presently employed it as an instrument of their personal ambitions. In the last century B.C. it was repeatedly used to coerce the civilian authorities, or to support military adventurers in civil wars against their rivals. Thus the republican constitution was smothered under recurrent military dictatorships.



But in 30 B.C. the era of military disorder was terminated by the future Emperor Augustus, who now provided the Roman Empire with an enduring new constitution. In theory, this constitution was nothing more than a return to the republican system as it existed before the military usurpations, with a few adjustments of detail. Once more the government was to be directed by the Senate, under whose authority Augustus offered to act as a mere republican magistrate. It is uncertain whether Augustus was sincere in his attempt to revive the Republic; in any case the attempt was made too late. In Britain a restoration was effected in 1660, because the soldiers were willing to resume obedience to the legitimate government; at Rome Augustus "held a wolf by the ears" and could not let go. Accordingly he retained the army in his own hands and defined his prerogative in such a fashion that he continued "emperor" ("imperator"—*i.e.*, commander-in-chief) of the Roman soldiers. With the power of the sword, too, went the power of the purse. Not even Augustus could answer for the discipline of the troops unless he could guarantee their pay and pensions. Realising this clearly, he earmarked the greater part of the public revenue for his own use, and so added the power of patronage to that of coercion. Under these conditions the Senate could at best be but a subordinate partner. In actual fact it did not secure even this modest position. In the civil wars it had lost a high proportion of its old members, who, with all their faults, had at least possessed experience and the faculty of decision. It was now replenished with men who lacked the tradition of office and suffered a failure of nerve in the council chamber. Thus the Senate definitely lost its



directive ability and got into the habit of referring all questions of moment to the emperor, who by default became responsible for the whole of Roman policy, both foreign and domestic; upon him, too, devolved the framing of new laws, and, as the habit of "appealing unto Cæsar" spread, of interpreting old ones.

In recognition of this, Augustus and his successors eventually brushed aside the Senate and the old republican magistracy, and turned for advice and assistance to a privy council and a nominated executive of their own. The privy council is not much heard of, but as a court of appeal it had great influence on the development of Roman law. The new executive was an essentially professional body, whose members might spend a lifetime at their work. Being freely recruited from the well-to-do classes of all Italy and eventually of the whole empire, and in receipt of generous salaries, the service attracted men of adequate ability. Hence its numbers and importance grew continually, and by degrees it took over all the routine of imperial administration. In effect the Roman emperors were autocrats. But their despotism was tempered with republican forms, and being based on general consent it became a stable form of government.

The results of the new system in the military sphere have been surveyed in Chapter I. Its record in civil administration may best be tested by considering in turn the city of Rome, Italy, and the other lands of the empire in the first two centuries A.D.

The city of Rome in the days of Augustus contained a population of hardly less, and perhaps considerably more, than one million inhabitants. Under ancient conditions merely to maintain the physical existence of such a con-

glomeration of people was a difficult task. Moreover in Rome the problem was aggravated by the embarrassing rate at which the city had grown in the period of the great conquests, and the turbulent character of its population, which comprised numerous slaves or descendants of slaves dumped down as prisoners of war, and many broken men in quest of relief. Yet under the Republic the administration was left over to a small handful of short-term magistrates. The result was chaos. To mention but two of the worst failures, destitution was merely aggravated by indiscriminate grants of free corn (with free theatre and circus tickets thrown in), which created new paupers as fast as old ones were relieved; and, worse still, in the absence of any regular police force organised bands of roughs terrorised the city and at times emulated the soldiery in coercing the legal authorities. Augustus remedied most of these defects by the establishment of a number of special offices, with adequate permanent staffs, under the control of experienced members of the new imperial executive. The departments included a Board of Works, a Water Board, a Tiber Conservancy Board, a Corn Supply Office, a Fire Brigade, and a Police Force. In one instance Augustus deliberately refrained from a salutary reform. Fearing the temporary discontent which would have attended a drastic curtailment of doles and free amusements, he perpetuated the city's parasitic proletariat. Yet in the first two centuries A.D. Rome was transformed almost beyond recognition. In its outward aspect, as its ruins still prove, it could now compare with the show-towns of the Greek world. Its water supply, already plentiful under the Republic, became more lavish than in most great towns of the present day. Best of all,



the town crowd, if unduly pampered, was at least kept firmly under control, and ceased to be a disturbing factor in Roman politics.

Italy, which at the beginning of the Christian era had a population of perhaps seven to ten millions, was less in need of reform. Here the government of the Republic had shown wisdom beyond its usual wont and had solved most of the outstanding political problems. At the time of the conquest of Italy the Roman government had usually imposed satisfactory settlements. It had displayed characteristic Roman liberality in allowing its dependents to maintain their own local dialects, religions, and systems of government; and it had shown a forbearance equally rare at Rome and elsewhere in leaving the conquered peoples untaxed. The Italians, who were more or less closely related in race to the Romans and stood under the government of similar municipal aristocracies, acquiesced readily in Roman rule. They bore the burden of conscription cheerfully and contributed an ever-increasing quota to the Roman armies which went forth to conquer the rest of the Mediterranean. Nay more, they paid the Romans the sincere compliment of imitation. Towards the end of the pre-Christian era they had everywhere adopted Latin as their language and assimilated their mode of life to that of Rome. Thus the diverse mass of peoples who inhabited Italy before the Roman conquest eventually coalesced into a homogeneous nation. There remained one political reform for the emperors to accomplish. Although the Roman Senate, after much agitation and a dangerous rebellion, had conceded the demand for Roman citizenship which had meanwhile arisen among the Italians, it had succeeded in keeping

them out of high office at Rome. Augustus freely admitted Italians into the Senate, and, what mattered more, into his new executive, and thus brought the latent political ability of the entire country into the service of the Roman Empire.

On the other hand, much required to be done towards putting the rest of the empire on a satisfactory basis. Taken as a whole, the empire under Augustus had perhaps 70,000,000 to 80,000,000 inhabitants, the western half, exclusive of Italy, about 25,000,000 to 30,000,000. In dealing with its acquisitions outside of Italy the Senate had recourse to the same alternatives as the British government has adopted in India. It allowed some of the new territories to retain their native rulers, others it brought directly under Roman control under the title of "provinces." In the West the Senate almost invariably followed the latter system, and it is this method alone which requires description here.

In the administration of the provinces the Senate adhered to the principle of entrusting local government to the individual towns, or where urban centres had not yet been formed, to the separate cantons. On the other hand, it would not commit the safety of the provinces to local levies, but garrisoned them with drafts from Italy. By way of compensation, it imposed special taxes, of which the most important was a levy on the produce of the land. A resident Roman governor, besides maintaining order and ensuring the payment of tribute, also exercised jurisdiction in concurrence with the local tribunals, for which purpose each province was divided into assize circuits.

This system, albeit imposed with honest intentions,



did not produce satisfactory results under the Republic. Like in the early days of British India, the temptation to take advantage of a disarmed population proved too strong for many a governor and his staff. In some provinces the burden of taxation was aggravated by the chicanery of the "publicani" or private tax-farmers to whom the Roman government left over the collection of the revenues. At best, such a régime called for a careful selection of officials, constant supervision by the home authorities, and prompt punishment of offenders against the provincial charter. But the Senate made no systematic attempt to apply adequate safeguards, and the provincials were left without assurance of fair treatment.

Under Augustus a division of the provinces was made into two classes—imperial and senatorial. Since Augustus would not let the control of the army pass out of his hands, he was obliged to retain under his immediate supervision all those provinces which required a considerable military establishment. Accordingly he had himself appointed titular governor of all the frontier provinces and of such other territories as were still unsettled, leaving the pacified districts at the Senate's disposal. In Western Europe the imperial provinces were: Lusitania (W. Spain and Portugal), Hispania Tarraconensis (N. and E. Spain), Aquitania (S.-W. France), Gallia Lugdunensis (Central France), Belgica (N. France, Belgium, W. Switzerland, and the Rhineland), and Rhaetia (E. Switzerland and S.-W. Germany). Britain was added to this list by Claudius, and under Domitian the Rhineland was made into two separate provinces, Germania Superior and Germania Inferior. The Senate retained control of Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica, Gallia Narbonensis

(S.-E. France), and Baetica (S. Spain). This distinction, though primarily intended for military purposes, also affected the civilian administration. The provinces of which Augustus was titular governor received the benefit of numerous reforms. The actual residing governors whom the emperor sent out to administer on his behalf were picked members of his new executive; they were paid on a scale which left little excuse for extortion; they were kept in touch with headquarters by means of a new postal service which rendered possible a brisk interchange of despatches; and if found guilty of malpractices they were promptly cashiered. The senatorial provinces did not share in these reforms, but they were protected by a new institution which Augustus introduced into every part of the empire, the provincial "concilium" or parliament. Once in every year deputies from all the cities or cantons of a province were summoned to meet at the provincial capital, and while not empowered to share in the general administration were encouraged to examine grievances and prefer complaints to Rome. It would be absurd to pretend that under the emperors the provincials had nothing to fear; the story of Boadicea is sufficient proof to the contrary. Yet the new safeguards against oppression were generally adequate, and gross misgovernment henceforth became a rarity.

Another far-reaching change which took place under the emperors was the enlistment of the provincials in the Roman army. By the time of Vespasian (A.D. 70) the tables had been turned; it was now the provinces and no longer Italy that bore the chief share in the defence of the empire. It now but remained to confer Roman franchise on the provincials and to admit them into the



Senate and the imperial executive. In view of the differences of race, language, and culture which still existed between the provinces and Italy, Augustus made no wholesale change in their status. Yet he could not refuse Roman citizenship to the many individual provincials who earned it by service in the Roman army, and thus a considerable trickle of provincials into the ranks of the citizen body set in. Moreover, as we shall see in Chapter IV., in the first two centuries A.D. the provinces, and especially those of the West, became assimilated to Rome and Italy, and the number of provincials who were hardly to be distinguished from native Romans grew apace. A more rapid extension of franchise began under Claudius and Vespasian, and was continued in the second century under a series of rulers (Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius), all of whom had Spanish or Gallic blood in their veins. The last step in this process was taken in A.D. 210 by the Emperor Caracalla, who ruled that all free men in the empire (with a few unimportant exceptions) should be Roman citizens. Concurrently with the enfranchisement of the provincials went their admission to high office. The Emperor Claudius set the example by drafting a batch of Gallic nobles into the Senate; Vespasian systematically enrolled provincials; by the second century A.D. the Senate was becoming a fair representative of the empire as a whole, and the imperial executive was recruited with equal impartiality from all sides. The Roman Empire, from being a national state with foreign dependencies, had passed into a cosmopolitan commonwealth.

From this survey it appears that in the first two centuries A.D. the administration of the Roman Empire

was a notable improvement on that of the republican period. Of course it did not stand above criticism. One serious defect was the lack of a fool-proof rule of succession. In theory the emperors were chosen by the Senate. In actual fact their selection depended on the family prejudice of the previous ruler, or, worse still, on the capricious interference of the soldiery. Hence the line of the early emperors produced an unusual number of abnormal personalities. Caligula and Nero have become bywords for extravagance. Both this couple and other more sober rulers, Tiberius, Claudius, and Domitian, caused havoc among their court and in the senatorial class by taking life on trivial pretexts. In the second century, it is true, the succession was ordained on a system which could hardly be improved upon: each emperor selected the next ruler among his officials on grounds of merit alone, and without regard to family considerations. In regard to personalities it would be difficult to find any line of rulers to surpass Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius. One sin of omission may perhaps be recorded against these men. In the second century A.D. the empire enjoyed such stability that it could safely have been made the subject of fresh political experiments. In particular, we might ask whether the time had not come to increase the power of the provincial parliaments. Given the need to decentralise the administration of the empire and to convert it, say, into a federation of self-governing units—and without some such development it could hardly hope to escape that enfeeblement to which all absolutisms seem predestined—the second century offered the best opportunities for initiating this process. If we take this view of the case, we shall regret



that the emperors of that period contented themselves with the ideal of benevolent despotism. Finally, as we shall see later on (Chapter VI.), the early emperors did not definitely solve the problem of military interference in politics.

Yet it was under the constitution of Augustus that the Roman Empire reached its highest point of general prosperity. The escapades of the worst emperors had little effect outside of Rome itself and the restricted circles of high society; the new imperial executive soon got into its stride and reached a good average level of efficiency; last but not least, the "pax Romana" (Roman peace), never more undisturbed than under the early Roman emperors, covered a multitude of sins.

Moreover, whatever criticisms modern historians may offer, the inhabitants of the Roman Empire greeted the new autocracy in no uncertain voice. In addition to the usual expressions of gratitude they introduced the rite of emperor-worship. Such adoration of rulers was, indeed, nothing new in the ancient world. It had been practised in the early Oriental monarchies and in the later Greco-Macedonian kingdoms. In the Roman Empire it was presently organised as a compulsory official cult. But although, like all such institutions, it ended in being no more than an empty form, in the reign of Augustus it was a sincere and spontaneous manifesto on the part of his subjects. Under such conditions it is not surprising that a poet of the Augustan period should have coined the phrase "Roma æterna" ("Rome the Eternal"). To an ordinary human eye the Roman Empire as constituted in the first two centuries A.D. might seem destined to last for ever.

## CHAPTER III

*ECONOMIC CONDITIONS*

THE economic preponderance of West over East is a product of comparatively recent history. In ancient times, despite the Roman conquests, the West always lagged somewhat behind. Not that it had remained altogether undeveloped before those conquests. In many parts of Western Europe a knowledge of agriculture, of textile industry, of ceramics and metallurgy had been introduced in the second millennium B.C., if not earlier. In the first millennium economic progress was stimulated under the influence of immigrants from the Eastern Mediterranean, Phœnicians, Etruscans, and Greeks. In Central Italy the Etruscans introduced intensive agriculture and opened up the copper and iron mines of those regions. In Spain the Carthaginians established colonies along the southern coast, where they collected the produce of the rich silver and copper mines. In Britain the same people developed the traffic in Cornish tin, which they distributed over the Mediterranean. In Sicily and Southern Italy Greek settlers introduced the cultivation of the vine and olive. In Gaul the colonists from Greece at Massilia (Marseille) set in motion a general trade for which the natives presently provided their own coinage.

The Romans, in their turn, following the example of their Etruscan and Greek neighbours, gave their attention to the scientific development of the lands which they appropriated: by the beginning of the Christian era they



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had gone a long way towards converting Italy into the "Garden of Europe." Yet the Roman conquests in Western Europe at first retarded as much as they advanced economic development. Roman rule, as we have seen in Chapter II., entailed upon the provinces regular payments of tribute and not infrequent additional exactions by governors and tax-gatherers. It also brought in its train visitations by unofficial Roman money-lenders, who certainly filled their own pockets and probably did little to stimulate local production. For this drainage of wealth from the provinces to Rome, the as yet somewhat precarious state of peace, which was all that the Romans at first could offer in return, was hardly an adequate compensation. In Italy one source of wealth which might have ensured additional prosperity to the countryside was left untapped. The rapid growth of the city of Rome in the age of the great conquests created an urgent demand for increased supplies of corn. But the Roman government, instead of stimulating corn production in Italy, met the need by increased importation from Sicily and more especially from Africa, whose subject populations could conveniently be made to pay their tribute in wheat rather than money. Under these conditions the cultivation of corn in Italy, which should have expanded proportionately with the growth of the capital, remained stagnant or even underwent a reduction. In the days of the Republic, therefore, the Roman conquests brought with them a sporadic rather than a solid increase of prosperity.

Under the Roman emperors the benefits of Roman rule soon began to show more plainly in the economic sphere. Not that Augustus and his successors formed any consistent plan for the development of the provinces.

Their outlook, as a rule, was narrowly fiscal, and their attitude to economic problems may best be described as one of *laissez-faire*, punctuated by spasmodic and not always well-considered interventions. But to those who were ready to help themselves the new system of government offered far better conditions. The "pax Romana" now became firmly established and everywhere produced a profound sense of security. The illegitimate exactions of the officials and the attendant harpies, as we have seen in Chapter II., were severely checked.

But these negative aids to prosperity were not the only ones which accrued under the new régime. Among the greatest gifts of Rome to her subjects was the network of roads which she built in every corner of her empire. Though primarily an instrument of conquest, these roads sooner or later also became arteries of commerce. Under the Republic a complete road-system, radiating from Rome, had been established in Italy; but in the provinces not much as yet had been achieved. On the other hand, the construction of new roads was vigorously pushed forward under the early emperors, many of whose milestones survive to attest their activities. In Gaul radial routes, following wherever possible the commodious river valleys of that country, spread out in every direction from the central hub of Lyon. In Britain a similar system, whose general lines are still followed by the main railway tracks, had its inevitable meeting-point in London. In Spain no universal road-centre was offered by Nature, but sectional systems were constructed round Saragossa, Cordova, and Merida, and a trunk road extended from the Eastern Pyrenees to Cadiz. No less remarkable than the high mileage of the Roman roads was the solidity of their



construction. Their surfaces were made of the hardest material available (blocks of volcanic lava in the neighbourhood of Rome, concrete in regions where no durable stone was to be found); their foundations were deep enough to prevent water-logging or subsidence. Where rivers had to be crossed they were usually provided with substantial bridges. At Alcantara on the Lower Tagus, 150 feet above flood-level, may still be seen a Roman bridge in an almost perfect state of preservation; in many other parts of the Roman Empire medieval or modern bridges are carried on the old Roman foundations. The Roman roads, therefore, were all-weather roads, and they afforded better facilities for travel than Western Europe has possessed at any time previous to the nineteenth century. Of the waterways of Western Europe in Roman times there is less to be said. Though the Romans did comparatively little to improve these, they made full use of such as were navigable. Rome itself, London and Seville were busy river ports; but the most striking development of inland navigation took place in Gaul and the Rhineland, where all the available rivers were made into regular avenues of traffic.

Another stimulus to economic development was provided by the mere presence of Roman garrisons in Western Europe, and of "colonies"—*i.e.*, corporate settlements of retired soldiers, of whom large numbers were pensioned off in the western provinces, especially in Southern Gaul and in Spain. These Roman or romanised settlers usually brought with them a higher standard of living, and by their residence in undeveloped countries created profitable new markets. It is no mere accident that districts like the Rhineland and Belgium, in whose vicinity were

large Roman camps, became conspicuously prosperous under Roman rule. Again, the provinces benefited by the diffusion of Roman law, which not only had force in the courts of the governors, but was also in large measure adopted by the municipal tribunals. Under the emperors the civil branch of Roman law in particular had become a most equitable and adaptable instrument, and under its protection traders could count on fair play. Lastly, commerce in the Roman Empire had the advantage of a sound and uniform system of coinage. Although the emperors did not wholly prohibit the issue of money in local mints, in point of fact their coinage acquired a virtual monopoly in Western Europe, and during the first two centuries A.D. it remained plentiful and of good quality. Under the early Roman emperors the trading community was probably less troubled with currency problems than in any subsequent age. For these reasons Western Europe was opened up more rapidly in the first two centuries A.D. than in any previous period of equal length.

A notable if somewhat uneven progress was realised in agriculture. In Italy the standards of the Republican period, already high, were hardly improved upon, but there is no reason to believe that they were not in general maintained. The cultivation of the olive may have suffered a decline, but that of the vine was carried to the furthest profitable point. In Spain, Gaul, and Britain agricultural development was somewhat sporadic. As might have been expected, the Plateau of Castile and the West and North of Britain remained largely under timber, or scrub and heather; and Central Gaul was allowed to retain large preserves of forest. But in Provence, in



Andalusia, in Southern and Eastern Britain there is plentiful evidence of intensive development. In Southern Gaul and Spain the "Mediterranean trinity" of corn, wine, and oil were produced in excess of local needs; the drier and warmer parts of England were thickly sown with corn, and furnished a surplus for export. Great enterprise was shown by the Romans in acclimatising Mediterranean or Asiatic fruit-trees, such as the cherry and the peach, and in transplanting their favourite garden trees. The agricultural development of Western Europe under Roman rule was hardly equal to that of Northern Africa, which might almost be called phenomenal, but it definitely converted this region into an area of intensive cultivation.

The most characteristic and ubiquitous industry under the early Roman emperors was that of building, which received a powerful stimulus from the extensive road construction of the period, and from the rapid growth of towns. The history of mining is marked by one outstanding failure. Except for a few outcrop workings, the immense deposits of coal in Western Europe were not exploited at all. Of the other mineral resources, the copper of Etruria appears to have become definitely exhausted, the tin of Cornwall was temporarily supplanted by that of Spain, and the iron-field of Lorraine was not yet attacked in earnest. In general, however, Western Europe was ransacked for its metal deposits. In Gaul the iron mines of the South, the Centre, and the Meuse district were in operation. In Britain extensive slag-heaps on the iron-fields of the South and West and not a few surviving ingots of lead attest the activity of miners in the Roman period. In Spain, which had long been the chief source of metal for the Mediterranean peoples, mining operations

were carried on more vigorously than ever, the principal products being tin on the Atlantic Coast, copper in the south-west, silver in the south-east, iron and mercury in the centre of the peninsula. The ceramic industries were confined to comparatively few regions. In Italy the fine table ware of Arretium (in Etruria) had a considerable vogue in the days of Augustus, but suffered an early decline. In Spain there were no important potteries except at Saguntum on the east coast, and in Britain all the better ware of the first two centuries A.D. was imported. On the other hand, in Gaul and the Rhineland ceramic ware was produced on an unprecedented scale. In the first century A.D. mass manufacture of table ware was begun in the south-west; from one factory at Graufesenque nearly 300,000 pieces have been registered by modern archæologists. In the second century the centre of production shifted to Lezoux, in Auvergne, and about A.D. 200 to Rheinzabern (near Speyer), to Trier, and to Tongres (in Belgium). From one centre or another Gaul provided pottery for the greater part of the Roman Empire. Of minor industries, several which had previously been localised in the Levant eventually spread to Western Europe. The making of paper out of papyrus reeds, which had for many centuries been an Egyptian monopoly, was transplanted under Augustus to Rome, where the considerable book trade henceforth found its raw materials ready to hand. About the same time the craft of glass-making, which had lately received a fillip by the invention of the blow-pipe, travelled from Egypt and Phœnicia to Italy, and thence to Gaul and Britain. The principal centres of glass-production in the West were in Campania (near Naples), at Lyon, and chief of all at Cologne.



From the consolidation of Roman rule the traders probably derived more benefit than any other class. Italy, which still drew tribute from the provinces, suffered in consequence from a somewhat lop-sided traffic. Rome itself, by virtue of its sheer bulk and of the high-life in its fashionable quarters, created a large import trade for itself and for its seaport at Ostia. In Western Europe the development of agriculture and industry produced a more than corresponding growth of trade. This traffic comprised not only articles of luxury but cheap commodities, and even the necessities of the poor; and these objects sometimes travelled the entire length or breadth of a continent. Of the numerous ramifications of the commerce of Western Europe it will suffice to give a few outstanding examples. The surplus corn, wine, and oil of Southern France and Southern Spain were exported wholesale to Rome. Outside this city there may still be seen an artificial mound (the "Monte Testaccio") consisting of the débris of coarse pottery, in which the wine and oil from overseas were transported. Similarly the wine trade between Bordeaux and England, which played such a part in the Middle Ages, had its prototype under the Roman emperors. Other evidence of transmarine trade to England comes from London and Richborough, some of whose buildings were faced with marble from Carrara in Italy. Fragments of bronze stamped with the name of the great founder Cippius Polybius of Capua (near Naples) have been discovered in Scotland and Northern England; other bronze ware from Capua found its way to Northern Germany and Sweden, and brooches from Belgium penetrated as far as the Caucasus. But the most striking evidence of the scale of Roman commerce

is furnished by the exports of pottery. The fine table-ware of Arretium travelled to the Rhineland, to London, and Silchester (near Reading). The somewhat less luxurious products of Gaul were traded even in remote parts of Wales and Scotland. Two unopened boxes of Graufesenque fabric have been found in a retailer's shop at Pompeii, and specimens of precisely the same ware have been noticed in the Neckar valley. Even the coarser wares were sent to distant countries. Cheap lamps bearing the trade-mark of a potter from Modena, in Northern Italy, have been recovered from rural cemeteries in Northern Africa, and conversely lamps from Morocco are found in Spain. Similarly, rough textile products, such as the friezes of Flanders, had a sale among the poorer folk in Italy. It was largely due to this long-distance trade that the bigger towns of Western Europe, Arles and Lyon, Cologne and London, owed their prosperity.

While the volume of production and exchange in Western Europe rose to dimensions which were probably not surpassed until the eighteenth century, economic technique and, in consequence, economic organisation hardly progressed beyond the conditions of the later Middle Ages. On the land the engrossing of small holdings into "latifundia," or large estates, which had already been in full swing under the Republic, went on as before. The emperors themselves, and the numerous body of enriched manufacturers and traders, who were eager to acquire the social status of landowners, accumulated real property wherever the chance offered. Yet the rate of transfer from small to large owners was never rapid, and it was partly set off by the continuous provision of allot-



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ments to ex-soldiers. Moreover, the owners of the "latifundia" did not introduce large-scale methods of production, which in the almost complete absence of machinery would have brought little advantage. As a rule they reserved a moderate-sized home farm for direct exploitation by their own staff, but let and sublet the outlying portions to groups of small cultivators who followed the time-honoured methods of the peasant proprietor. Industry, too, continued to be "manufacture" in the literal sense of "production by hand," and tended to remain in the hands of small masters. Some exceptions to this rule must be admitted. In Rome and Italy, where building activity reached its highest point, quarrying and brick-making were organised on a large scale. Similarly, the larger pottery works in Gaul must have been factories in the modern sense. Yet in general the unit of production remained a mere shop. The small local industries of Pompeii, as one would expect, were mostly practised in single work-rooms; but commodities intended for sale at a distance were often produced under similar conditions. The brisk export industry of Belgium was in large part located in annexes to the bigger farmsteads. The mining fields of Western Europe were mainly exploited by small entrepreneurs, each driving his adit separately in medieval fashion, although the actual ownership of the mines was usually vested in the emperor himself.

It is rather more strange that commerce was no more highly organised than industry. The Romans certainly did not lack the wit to conduct trade on a large scale. Already in the days of the Republic the tax-gatherers had associated in companies resembling our present joint-stock concerns, and the mercantile world was familiar

with such devices as letters of credit and bankers' orders. Under the emperors the easy conditions of travel and the large volume of long-distance traffic might have been expected to favour the growth of "big business." Nevertheless, most of the trade continued in the hands of individual merchants or of simple partnerships engaging their personal capital, and banking operations did not assume the dimensions that might have been expected. Under such conditions it is not surprising that much of the retail trade was still carried on at occasional street-markets or fairs, and that the large store had not yet come into existence.

A common feature of Roman industry and commerce consisted in the large number of guilds in which craftsmen and traders were associated. But these guilds were almost wholly confined to social activities and hardly concerned themselves with the regulation of prices or wages or methods of production.

The least satisfactory part of Roman economic life, if we may judge by the somewhat inadequate evidence on the subject, was the depressed condition of the labouring class. In Italy a large proportion, perhaps as much as one-half, of the labourers consisted of slaves. This servile system of labour was essentially a result of the great conquests, when unlimited supplies of war prisoners were brought into Rome. The stocks of slaves were subsequently kept up by organised kidnapping in the backward parts of the Mediterranean area; and under the emperors, when opportunities for man-hunting became more restricted, the gaps were partly filled by breeding. In the provinces the slaves formed a smaller but not a negligible part of the population. While a portion of the slaves



were occupied with domestic service, or in the lowest ranks of the public services, the majority of them were put to work in agriculture or industry. On the whole, the Roman system of slavery compares well with that of negro slavery in modern times. It was capable of better results, for the slaves were mostly of similar race to that of their masters. Even those who came from the backwoods of Thrace or Germany could be trained to a fair level of skill; the Levantine slaves of Greek or Syrian stock were often more intelligent than their masters. Moreover, the Roman owners not only realised that it was good business to keep a slave in proper physical condition, but they recognised that a specially clever or trustworthy servant would repay promotion to a better status. Hence slaves commonly acted as bailiffs on farms, as skilled craftsmen or foremen in workshops, as cashiers or managers of commercial firms. Better still, in return for good service Roman slaves had a reasonable chance of receiving their personal freedom, and perhaps of being set up by their former masters in a small business. Among the inhabitants of the Roman Empire the ex-slaves formed a conspicuous and a most enterprising class. Yet slavery at best was not a substitute for free labour. It would perhaps be unfair to lay much stress on the conditions in certain Roman mines, where slaves of certified bad character were worked and whipped to death in rapid relays, for cruel treatment of this kind was probably quite exceptional. But even under favourable circumstances slaves tended to be half-hearted and required more supervision than free men. In the case of agricultural work the wastefulness of servile labour was openly admitted when the great landowners of Italy began to replace their slave

staffs with free tenants. Again, it is not unlikely that slavery was part cause of the lack of industrial inventiveness which characterised the Roman world, for the same deficiency has been a feature of modern slave-owning societies. Lastly, while slave labour can hardly be said to have driven free labour to the wall, since under the conditions of Roman economic technique the demand for labour probably kept ahead of the supply, it would unfailingly tend to depress the level of wages and the status of the free workers. It is unfortunately almost impossible to obtain trustworthy estimates of the free workmen's rates of real wages; but such information as we possess suggests that they seldom rose much above the line of mere subsistence.

But in spite of the various economic shortcomings which we have noticed, it is probable that the general level of material welfare in Western Europe under the Roman emperors was as good as at any time before the Industrial Revolution. There is hardly a district of Western Europe which does not contain remains of well-built towns, of handsomely furnished houses, or of comfortably equipped farmsteads of the Roman era. In any case, the economic life of the Roman Empire provided a sufficient material base for the continuance of a high civilisation.



## CHAPTER IV

*SOCIAL LIFE AND CULTURE*

THE results of Roman rule in Western Europe are not summed up in the "pax Romana" or in the economic impetus which it evoked. In the eyes of many its greatest achievement was the diffusion of Roman culture.

This achievement was no more the outcome of a deliberate policy of romanisation than the material development of Western Europe was due to any considered economic policy of the Roman Government. So far as the Romans had a sense of mission, it was in their capacity as administrators and keepers of the world's peace. They did not proclaim that there was but one culture and that they were its prophets; indeed, when in the course of their conquests they met a people like the Greeks, who were more advanced in civilisation than themselves, they freely acknowledged the fact and took lessons from a beaten enemy. But in Western Europe the task of romanisation was not particularly difficult. The peoples of the West were for the most part not far removed in race from the Italians: they spoke languages which were not fundamentally different, and they practised religions which could easily be reconciled with that of their conquerors. At the same time they were at least as far behind the Romans in general culture as the Romans had previously fallen short of the Greeks. By the beginning of the Christian era Roman civilisation stood at its height. As the result of their schooling at the hands of the Greeks the Romans had acquired social

refinement and artistic tastes; they had polished up the Latin tongue into a euphonious and flexible instrument of thought; and they had created a literature which is still one of the world's classics. Lastly, the very forbearance of the Romans in not forcing their speech, their customs, and their cults upon their dependents made these all the more ready to adopt them of their own free will. Thus the first two centuries A.D. witnessed a process by which the peoples of Western Europe became assimilated to the Romans and to each other.

Of the instruments by which this assimilation was carried out the most effective was the Roman army. This, as we have seen, attracted year in year out some thousands of recruits who stayed with the colours for some twenty years or so, and during that period felt the influence of a powerful *esprit-de-corps*. Small wonder that they emerged from the army as true and good representatives of Roman civilisation. These romanised ex-soldiers in turn passed on to others the gifts which they had received. As a rule they were pensioned off into "colonies"—*i.e.*, corporate settlements which at the earliest possible stage were raised to the status of self-governing towns. These colonies received an essentially Roman type of constitution; they used Latin as their official language; and in every way they made themselves into replicas of Italian townships. In this atmosphere the native wives whom the colonists usually married, and any other indigenous persons who were attracted to the settlement, could hardly fail to succumb to Roman influence. Thus, on the frontiers and behind them, the soldiers were incidentally spreading Roman culture. Of the civilian agents of romanisation the men



of business were no doubt the most pervasive. These indeed might not be Italian by birth—as a matter of fact they often were Greeks or Syrians or, in Gaul, natives—yet they could hardly help spreading the use of Latin, which in the western provinces inevitably became the language of commerce and industry. But scarcely less ubiquitous were the schoolmasters, who were privileged under the laws of Augustus to acquire Roman franchise on easy terms, and to enjoy exemption from various taxes wherever they took up residence. Italian, Greek, or native, the schoolmasters would certainly make the teaching of Latin one of their chief aims.

In reviewing the results of this process of romanisation, we may begin by considering its effects on the material life of Western Europe. The most striking evidence of Roman influence in this direction was the rapid growth of towns. Previous to the Roman conquest the inhabitants of Western Europe had for the most part been dispersed over the countryside. Small settlements of craftsmen and traders might be found in the more civilised districts (especially in Gaul); but these as yet would be neither numerous nor wealthy, and the governing nobilities, as in the Middle Ages, remained essentially rustic. Under Roman rule the increase of public security drew the natives from the heights into the plains (occasionally with the help of a little forcible persuasion on the part of a Roman governor bent on routing out robber strongholds); the lure of gain or of a brighter life attracted them into some urban centre. Thus the old native settlements and the Roman colonies grew into real towns; and the “*canabæ*” or bazaars which usually formed round the Roman frontier camps here and there (as at Mainz) attained the status

of cities. The urbanisation of Spain can be measured by some surviving statistics. At the beginning of the Christian era Hispania Tarraconensis contained 179 urban communities and 114 rural cantons, Lusitania had 45 urban and 6 rural districts. By A.D. 150 Tarraconensis is divided into 275 units, of which 248 are urban, and the entire area of Lusitania is apportioned between 57 towns. Similarly the whole Italian peninsula was divided into some 450 city territories. In Britain, it is true, only 12 towns of any size were formed, and in Gaul the South alone was strongly urbanised. Besides, Roman cities seldom exceeded an acreage of half a square mile or a population of 50,000. Even so, town life played a greater part in Western Europe under Roman rule than at any subsequent time down to the nineteenth century.

In their situation and lay-out the Roman towns of Western Europe reflect the general sense of security which prevailed under the early emperors. As a rule they were established in the plains, hard by the natural centres of traffic. The most typical location is on a hill-slope or on a low flat bluff by the side of a navigable river: Lyon in Gaul and Merida in Spain are good examples from the Continent; London, York, and Chester in Britain. Another feature of these towns is that most of them were not fortified. The older foundations in Italy and Southern Gaul, which dated back to the pre-Christian era, were originally contained in a ring-wall, and the newer settlements in the military zone of course had to be protected. But in general the towns of more recent date were left open: in A.D. 61 the British rebels under Boadicea walked into London unchecked. It is also probable that many of the older cities followed the example of Rome,



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which burst its bounds and spread far beyond the enceinte of the Republican period. Under these conditions it became possible to dispose the Roman towns according to a set plan; in point of fact, their streets were invariably aligned in a regular pattern, and most commonly in the form of a chess-board. The width of the roads seldom exceeded twenty-five feet, and often was less than fifteen feet, so that wheeled traffic inside the towns had to be severely restricted. But the paving was as solid as that of the highroads in the country, and footwalks and gutters were provided.

The architects of Roman towns were at special pains to provide them with an abundance of good water. To this end they would construct aqueducts of anything up to sixty miles in length. The remains of some of these—*e.g.*, the Aqua Claudia at Rome, the “Puente” of Segovia, in Spain, and the magnificent Pont-du-Gard, near Nimes, in Southern France, are among the most impressive remains of the Roman Empire. It is reckoned that Rome was more lavishly furnished with water than most great towns of the present day; but in every city of the Roman Empire an ample supply might be taken for granted.

Within a Roman town the private dwelling-houses usually did not present an imposing appearance as seen from the street. At Ostia, the harbour town of Rome, blocks of flats have been excavated which would do honour to a modern European city. On the other hand, at Pompeii the well-to-do inhabitants lived in low-built houses which presented to the roadside little more than bare stretches of lime-washed wall. This latter type, which still survives in the more quiet Mediterranean

towns, was probably the prevailing one in ancient times. In Rome, where room was scarce, the poorer people were herded together in many-storied tenements; elsewhere they lived in garrets above shops or in huts with one or two rooms. In any case, their apartments were crazy structures of timber or mud-brick, and sorry to look at from within or without. The houses of the richer inhabitants were commonly built in stone or in concrete faced with burnt brick; they were well lighted and aired from inner courtyards, and where room permitted they had small rear-gardens; their rooms, which were numerous enough to give adequate privacy, were decorated with mosaic floors and frescoes on the inner walls, and tastefully if somewhat scantily furnished.

But the pride of ancient towns lay in their public rather than in their private buildings. Neighbouring cities competed with each other in making a brave display of public architecture; not only the town councils but the richer citizens spent freely, or even overspent themselves for this purpose. At the centre of each town would be a "forum" or open square, flanked with a city hall, municipal offices, and colonnades; the same square, or others provided specially for the purpose, would serve as shopping centres. The temples, which usually approximated to the Greek type, were smaller and less sumptuous than might have been expected. On the other hand, the open-air theatres, amphitheatres (circular arenas for beast-hunts and gladiatorial games), and circuses (with long out-and-home tracks) were designed on a far larger scale than the places of entertainment in modern towns of equal size. At Rome the Circus Maximus and the Colosseum (the principal amphitheatre) could



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accommodate 200,000 and 50,000 spectators respectively. The many surviving remains of similar structures in other towns—*e.g.*, at Verona, at Arles and Nîmes, at Mérida and Itálica (near Seville)—prove that these were proportionately on an equal if not on a larger scale. Lastly, even the villages and the battalion camps of Western Europe were furnished with bathing establishments. In the towns these usually contained suites for Turkish bathing as well as swimming tanks. Pompeii, with a population of perhaps 30,000, had at least three public baths; in Rome the number of baths is recorded to have exceeded 800.

On the countryside the chief evidence of material culture lay in the Roman “villas.” These were of two kinds. In Italy, all along the western seaboard and on the foothills of the Apennines, there were pleasure villas, mostly the property of wealthy residents of Rome, who regularly spent their summer holidays outside the city, and sometimes passed a considerable part of the year in peregrinating from one such country seat to another. The largest of such villas contained multiple suites of rooms, and extensive gardens in the trim French style. But the more usual type of villa was a large farmhouse belonging to a squire or a moderately rich bourgeois. Many specimens of this kind have been discovered in Italy, France, Belgium, Switzerland, the Rhineland, and Britain. Their living apartments formed but one small block of the farm buildings, but they were well constructed in stone or half-timber, and contained much solid comfort. Mosaic floors and central heating are a common feature of them; near Pompeii one such farmhouse was equipped with a hot-water tank.

The uniformity of culture in Western Europe at the beginning of the Christian era is particularly evident in the sphere of art. The "classical" style, which the Romans had borrowed from the Greeks and in turn transmitted to the western provinces, all but obliterated the native arts, which indeed gave little promise of independent growth, except among the Celtic peoples. By the time of the Roman conquests classical art was well matured and of a high average order of merit, though no longer capable of a great creative effort. Its most capable exponents under the Roman emperors were the architects, who, as we have seen, enjoyed exceptional opportunities at this period. Their work has the usual classical characteristics of simple plans, clear and firm outlines, and good proportions, but shows a tendency to excessive profusion of decorative detail. The best sculptors of the first two centuries A.D. did all their work in Italy. At Rome the remains of their decorative reliefs and their portrait statuary in the round—e.g., the Ara Pacis and the busts of the early emperors—are quite worthy of comparison with good Greek sculpture. In the western provinces the best surviving specimens are the grave-reliefs of the well-to-do bourgeoisie in France, Belgium, and the Rhineland, and the "Corbridge Lion" (now in the Corbridge Museum), with its somewhat unclassical vigour.

Of the minor arts, pottery, metallurgy, glass-work, and jewellery remained at a high level of technique. The "Augustus cameo" at Vienna, and the "Portland Vase" of coloured glass (now at the British Museum) are real triumphs in work of their kind; and the finely undercut glass, in which the museum at Cologne is especially rich, invites comparison with the best modern work. Almost



any museum of Roman antiquities contains specimens of bronze casting and of "terra sigillata"—*i.e.*, Gallic red-glazed pottery with embossed reliefs, which are mere factory products, but of high merit in regard to design.

But the most enduring result of romanisation was the diffusion of Latin. As the language of the army, of the civil administration, and of commerce, Latin had in any case an advantage over the native tongues; in addition, it was taught in the schools to the exclusion of the indigenous languages. This virtual monopoly of Latin was due to the fact that the schools themselves were a product of Roman rule. Previous to the Roman conquest systematic teaching in the western countries was limited to the priestly order of the Druids in Gaul, who taught scraps of Greek (derived from Massilia) to a few select pupils. Under the Roman dominion schools were opened even in remote mining villages. Boys and girls alike were admitted, and if we may argue to the provinces from Italy, where emperors and private benefactors vied with each other in establishing scholarship funds, even quite poor children would be able to attend. For the more well-to-do, higher schools were also set up in some of the towns, the teachers' salaries being not infrequently provided, or at any rate supplemented, out of the municipal exchequer. At Marseille, Bordeaux, and Trier, as well as at Rome, there were academies whose professors enjoyed handsome remuneration and a high social status. While in the elementary schools the tuition hardly went beyond the reading and writing of Latin, in the higher schools and academies literary appreciation and composition were also taught, and Greek as well as Latin was studied.

Under these conditions the native languages were driven underground. In Gaul, it is true, the Celtic tongue persisted even in the towns far into the second century, and went on being used in writing; but the failure of the indigenous tongues to revive after the end of Roman rule (except in a few odd corners) shows that previously they must have been in a moribund condition. Thus Latin was in a fair way towards becoming the universal language. In the towns even the labourers could write in it, and the richer classes freely adopted it as their mother-tongue. At Lyon it was even possible by A.D. 100 to obtain copies of recently published works by Italian authors. Moreover, the Latin of the western provinces was practically indistinguishable from that of Italy. The vulgarisms of a popular scribble in Gaul are much the same as those of a *graffito* at Pompeii; and the academic Latin of the provincial don is just as tediously correct as that of his Italian colleague.

Of the Latin literature of the early Christian era it is impossible to speak here at adequate length. By the beginning of that era it was well past its prime. In the sphere of poetry henceforth its only notable performances are some first-rate satire, many clever *vers d'occasion*, and one high-spirited epic. The historical writings of Tacitus stand in the front rank of ancient classics; but most of the other prose literature bears the mark of that addiction to euphuism and rhetoric which was the bane of the schools of that period. Even so, in the hands of the writers of the first and second centuries A.D. Latin remained a powerful and flexible instrument of expression. But the most remarkable fact about the literature of this epoch is that its chief authors were mostly natives



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of the western provinces. Gaul became the chosen of Latin oratory; Spain produced no less than four out of the six or seven leading names in post-Augustan literature, the epic poet Lucan, the satirist Seneca, the epigrammatist Martial, and the literary critic Quintilian.

Of the social life of Western Europe under the early Roman emperors we know less than might appear at first sight. Many writers, ancient and modern, have dilated on the extravagance and dissoluteness of high society in Rome. But Rome in this respect was not in the least typical of the Roman Empire as a whole: there is no warrant for transferring the peculiar vices of the idle rich of a capital to the bourgeoisie and the poorer classes of the provinces. There is evidence from literature, and from the numerous surviving tombstones of Italy and the western provinces, that marriages were reasonably prolific, and that the relations of husband and wife, of parents and children, of masters and domestics, were normally healthy. In one respect, indeed, Roman influence was beneficial in Western Europe, in that it assisted to break down the now obsolete patriarchal organisation of the family. According to Roman custom women were still given and taken in marriage without being consulted, and only in the second century A.D. did they become legal persons. But they could move quite freely inside the house and out; they retained their dowries and kept control of their property, and their education was often as careful as that of their brothers. It is difficult to strike the balance between the idealising records of family life under the early Roman emperors and the caricatures; in any case, there is no reason to suppose that it was fundamentally unsound.

The history of religion in Western Europe during the first two centuries A.D. was comparatively uneventful. Christianity had not as yet progressed in these regions. In Rome the Christians were sufficiently numerous by A.D. 64 to attract the notice of the persecuting Emperor Nero, and a persecution at Lyon in A.D. 177 proves that a considerable congregation had formed by then in the Gaulish capital. But as yet Christianity was mainly confined to the East. Despite a large Jewish colony at Rome, little was known as yet of Jewish religion in the West. In general the old-established pagan cults lived on by the force of inertia and in mutual toleration. But a double movement of displacement or absorption was in process. On the one hand, Italian deities made their entry into the western provinces. The Roman armies brought with them Jupiter and Mars, merchants introduced Mercury, and school-teachers the whole classical pantheon. The Roman administration usually observed a disinterested attitude in religious matters, but occasionally forced the pace of conversion. It encouraged the new religion of emperor-worship, and at its prompting temples were set up to Augustus in the provincial capitals of Gaul and Spain, and to Claudius in Colchester. By a somewhat unusual act of repression, Claudius prohibited Druidic rites in Gaul, and subsequent governors of Britain made an apparently successful attempt to stamp it out in their province. Thus the native deities were suppressed or absorbed in the corresponding Italian gods.

But it is doubtful whether these transformations involved much more than a change of name. A more important process was the introduction of certain Oriental cults, especially those of the Persian Mithra and the



Egyptian Isis. The worship of Isis, already well established in Italy by the time of Augustus, was subsequently carried by Eastern traders wherever they travelled in Western Europe, and has been traced in London. The cult of Mithra was disseminated by Oriental soldiers serving in Western quarters; dedications in his honour have been found along Hadrian's Wall. The peculiarity of these lay in the fact that they brought a message of hope, promised a blessed life after death, and imposed a change of heart on the convert. In some degree, therefore, they paved the way for Christianity.

Thus it was that in the first two centuries A.D. Western Europe emerged from barbarism and began to qualify itself for its future task as a pioneer of civilisation.

## CHAPTER V

### *CAUSES OF THE DECLINE*

IN the third century the solid prosperity which the Roman Empire had enjoyed since the commencement of the Christian era came to an end. In the ensuing period of decline the western half of the Empire in particular underwent a transformation, and by A.D. 455 it was entering upon that chrysalis stage of its existence which is known as the Dark Ages.

This decline, as is now generally agreed, was not due to any one overwhelming force, but to a multiplicity of causes. But among these factors we must endeavour to single out those which contributed most to the process of decay. There is at present a tendency to emphasise various physical agencies which may have been working

silently under the surface of Roman society. A question well worth considering is whether the territories of the Roman Empire were suffering from a progressive exhaustion of the soil. There is reason for suspecting that ancient agricultural processes had the effect of slowly killing the land under crops and plantations, and there is actual evidence that increasing areas were being left derelict from the third century onward. But as yet it is impossible to determine whether exhaustion of the land was more than a local phenomenon, and the depopulation of the countryside may be explained by causes of a social rather than a physical order.

Another line of research supposes a serious physical deterioration of the Mediterranean races. One old-standing explanation of the decline of the Roman Empire finds its main cause in the loose manner of life of its inhabitants, and points by way of proof to the extravagances of society in Rome itself. But we have seen that the escapades of the idle rich in the capital are no criterion of the general morality of the Empire; there is no evidence here of a decline sufficient to account for wholesale physical decay. A more recent hypothesis declares that the decline was due to the spread of malaria in the Mediterranean lands. Of the existence of malaria in antiquity there can be no reasonable doubt, for Greek and Roman writers have described its symptoms unmistakably. But in this instance again we are dealing with a factor of merely local importance. At the present time malaria is only endemic in a few small areas of the Mediterranean region, and shows no signs of spreading. There is no reason for thinking that the particular mosquito which is the sole carrier of the disease had a



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wider range in ancient times than to-day, and we cannot argue from its occurrence in certain marshy districts, such as the Tiber mouth, to its prevalence all over Italy, Spain, and Gaul.

A more adequate explanation, if correct in point of fact, could be found in the alleged deterioration of the stocks in the Roman Empire by dysgenic breeding. In view of the undoubtedly considerable intermixture of ancient races which resulted from war, slavery, and commerce, such deterioration might have been on a scale sufficient to make history. The difficulty here is to distinguish the superior stocks from the inferior. Attempts have been made to play off Nordics against Southerners, or Westerners against Orientals. But if a sufficiently wide survey of the history of Europe and the Nearer East be taken, it at once appears that their human stock was more uniform than diverse, that all of it was eminently civilisable, and yet liable to relapse into barbarism; and nothing in the known facts of ancient history enables us to pick out a hero and a villain to the piece. If racial deterioration took place at all, a better explanation may perhaps be found in the dysgenic effects of warfare, especially of the systematic and highly organised fighting which makes up so large a part of Roman history. So much at any rate is certain, that the conquering peoples of ancient history commonly ended by losing their military aptitudes, and the Italians, as we have already noticed, are no exception to this rule. This disappearance of soldierly qualities among the leading peoples of the Roman Empire would help to explain the loss of enterprise and of resourcefulness which characterises them in the days of the decline. But it is difficult to give actual

proof of over-killing, or to trace out in detail the dysgenic effects of such a process. To sum up, the physical factors in the decline of the Roman Empire have not yet been proved to be of such exclusive importance as to dispense us from considering other causes of decay.

Among the various social influences which may have acted adversely upon the Roman Empire, its educational system calls for a passing notice. In its higher stages, at any rate, this was too narrowly literary and bookish. It unduly neglected both natural and social science, and it merited the reproach which one ancient critic directed at it: "Our studies are for scholarship, not for life." But its sins of omission concerned only a small class and can hardly have had a far-reaching effect. The educational influence of Christianity has also been blamed, because of its anti-social teachings. The Christians, it is argued, ignored or opposed the Roman state authorities, and by their refusal of service in the army and in the civil administration seriously weakened the government. This accusation, if true, would be important, for in the third and fourth centuries the Church was permeating the West no less than the East, and its power for good or harm had by then grown considerable. But the anti-social tendency of early Christianity has been much exaggerated. The opposition of the Church to the emperors was but a passing phase: long before the Empire broke up the Christians had become reconciled with their former persecutors and had entered the imperial services in large numbers. It is equally mistaken to speak of the early Christians as being an obscurantist force. No doubt they shared in the general intellectual decline which marks the later days of the Roman Empire, but in no greater degree



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than others. The organisation of the early Church, which was the only notable piece of constructive statesmanship in the early centuries A.D., is clear proof that it contained its full share of the Roman Empire's remaining "intelligentsia."

The detrimental influence of slavery may be set down as a more serious factor. Its tendency to weaken self-reliance and to kill scientific inventiveness has been thoroughly proved in modern times, and no doubt also holds true of antiquity. In addition, as we have seen, it had the effect of keeping the labouring classes, both servile and free, too near the level of mere subsistence. But the economic hardships of these classes did not, at any rate, constitute such a direct menace to social order as has sometimes happened in modern societies. The Roman government was fully able to cope with manifestations of discontent on the part of the proletariat. In the republican period slave revolts had not been uncommon, but they had been crushed so effectively that under the emperors they did not recur on any serious scale. In the third and later centuries A.D. rebellions by serfs on the countryside of Gaul and Spain occasionally gave trouble, but do not appear to have been frequent incidents. The free labouring population in the towns sometimes took part in a riot, but in general it lacked the spirit of revolt, and was readily appeased by the government's generosity in the matter of doles and public amusements. It has been recently suggested that the insubordination of the later Roman armies, to which we shall have to refer presently, was in reality a manifestation of class-hatred on the part of the peasantry, from whom the soldiers were largely recruited, against the wealthy

bourgeoisie. But the existence of any such class-feeling within the Roman army cannot be proved: on the other hand, its prevailing sentiment was an extremely strong *esprit-de-corps* and professional pride, and the resentment of the troops, so far as it showed itself in acts of vengeance, was directed against their personal superiors, the emperors and other high officers, rather than against any social group.

Whatever value be attached to causes of another kind, it is clear that the political condition of the Empire had something to do with its decline. In Chapter II. it was suggested that the Roman Empire would have gained in strength if, say, from the second century onward its government had been progressively decentralised. In point of fact, its movement was in the opposite direction: the absolutism of the administration grew more rigid, and the capacity of the subjects for self-help was further undermined. This inertia of the "home front" certainly aggravated the troubles of the Roman emperors during the critical wars of the third and later centuries, and it helps to explain how German kings came to rule, as it were, by default where the Roman system had broken down. But it does not account for the initial failure of the Roman Government. This failure must have been due to some weakness within its own organisation.

The weakness did not lie in the personalities of the emperors. Among the later as among the earlier rulers there were occasional wantons and weaklings: Caligula, Nero and Commodus in the first two centuries A.D. are balanced by Maxentius, Honorius and Valentinian III. in the fourth and fifth. But it is at least as true of the later emperors as of the earlier that they were for the most



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part serious-minded men with a real capacity for leadership; for sheer energy, Diocletian, Constantine, and Valentinian I. may compare with Hadrian and Septimius Severus, while Aurelian stands unsurpassed in the list of Roman rulers. The only serious charge that can be brought against them is that they tended to treat symptoms rather than causes, and resorted to temporary palliatives where a radical cure was called for. But if they did not prevent the break up of the Empire, they are more to be pitied than blamed for their failure.

A more serious reproach may be cast upon the imperial executive. We shall see in Chapter VII. that this body, which in the first two centuries A.D. had greatly contributed to the consolidation of the Roman Empire, subsequently prepared in equal measure for its dissolution. From being strictly responsible for its administration, it became in effect more absolute than the emperors themselves, and by systematic abuse of its untrammelled power dissipated the fund of loyalty which previous centuries of good rule had built up among the subjects. In an age when the capacity for self-government was dying out, it was all the more essential that loyalty to the rulers should be fostered and preserved; when it was replaced by disaffection, or at least indifference, the Roman Empire truly became a colossus on feet of clay.

But even a clay-footed giant may stand firm so long as he does not receive a push. Who was it then that first jerked him off his balance? The initial impelling force came from the Roman army, which from one point of view was the saviour of the Roman Empire, and from another was its destroyer. We have already seen that in the last century B.C. the army allowed itself to be used as

an instrument of political rivalries, and thus extinguished the republican government. Under Augustus the soldiers settled down again to their proper duty of frontier defence, and for over two centuries they were generally to be found at their posts. But the tradition of interference in politics, once established, was never quite forgotten. A presage of future trouble was offered in A.D. 37, in 41, and again in 54, when the "prætorii" or household troops quartered at the gates of Rome took an active part in proclaiming three new emperors (Caligula, Claudius, and Nero), in each case putting pressure on the Senate to ratify their own choice of a candidate. This kind of electioneering did no more immediate harm than the similar intrusions of the Janissaries into Turkish, or of the Mamelukes into Egyptian politics; but the making and unmaking of emperors was a game that more than one could play at. Presently the troops on the frontiers discovered "that emperors could be set up at other places than at Rome." In A.D. 68-69, after the deposition of Nero by his own guards, a round of civil wars was fought, in which the army of the Rhine defeated the prætorii and in turn succumbed to a force from the Danube sector. For the time being, it is true, the fire burnt itself out, and a similar bout in A.D. 193, in which the guards and the armies of the Danube, of Syria, and of Britain took part, had a similar sudden ending. But in A.D. 235 the soldiers, as it were, established revolution in permanence. Having murdered a capable but not sufficiently masterful emperor, Alexander Severus, they kept on for fifty years at a game of political ninepins. Within this period no less than twenty-five emperors were hurried on and off the scene. With hardly an exception they were military



officers who rose up, or were raised up by their troops, as pretenders, and after a brief and uneasy reign were killed by some other pretender or by their own doubly faithless soldiery. After A.D. 284, with the accession of Diocletian, the orgy of emperor-making at last came to an end; but the fourth and fifth centuries witnessed several fresh outbreaks, and in the meantime the mischief had been done. The soldiers, intent on their political objects, had left the frontiers wide open. Enemies poured in on several sides and were defeated, only to come back. From this time onward the Empire stood under continual siege, and the western portion of it eventually gave way under the strain. The Roman army, therefore, may be regarded as the effective proximate cause of the age of insecurity and decline that set in about A.D. 235.

## CHAPTER VI

### *THE GERMANIC INVASIONS*

OF the foreign invaders who took advantage of the denudation of the Roman frontiers after A.D. 235 by far the most important were the Germanic tribes on the Rhine and Danube. In Britain the third century passed in almost unbroken peace. During the fourth century, it is true, repeated incursions from Scotland, Ireland, and Germany kept the northern border and the coastal regions in a state of alarm. Yet the Roman troops continually beat off these raids, and never allowed them to develop into a systematic conquest. In the course of the fifth century Britain passed out of Roman control, but this was due to the events on the Continent, which caused the

Roman garrison to be depleted to vanishing point. It was in France, Spain and Italy that the Romans lost Britain.

Of the invaders on the Continent it is easy to form an exaggerated conception. In point of numbers, the Germanic invaders were far inferior to the population of the Roman Empire, and theirs was not an exodus *en masse* under the stress of hunger. For many centuries those Germans who lived near the Roman frontier had possessed some knowledge of agriculture and handicraft, and as increasing contact with the Romans stimulated their economic development the pressure of their population on subsistence would grow less. Moreover, the Germans readily applied the corrective of internecine warfare to the evil of over-population. It is therefore picturesque nonsense to speak of the Roman Empire as being overwhelmed by Germany's "teeming millions." Neither did the Germans display any exceptional military ability, such as enabled the Huns, the Saracens, and the Tartars to make up for lack of numbers. In addition to their native physical vigour, they had a code of honour which bound the warriors always to close up on their chieftains, and as time went on they developed some capacity for united action. Among the invaders who troubled the Romans most were two groups named Franks and Alamanni. Since these people are never mentioned before the third century, it is probable that they were newly formed confederations. It is also fairly certain that the occasional German assaults on a very wide front were synchronised by arrangement and not by accident. On the other hand, the Germans lacked the hard training of the Roman soldiers, they had a much poorer equipment, they were far inferior in manœuvring



ability, they had neither skill nor patience to capture Roman fortifications or to set up artificial defences of their own. Under anything like equal conditions the Germans had no chance against the Roman armies of the first two centuries A.D., and in the ensuing period too they were no real match for them, provided always that the Roman defence was not hampered by internal dissensions.

The first serious failure of the Roman defence took place, significantly enough, in A.D. 69, the year of the first civil war since the fall of the Republic. The army of the Rhine, bent on emperor-making, had marched off to Italy, leaving a mere skeleton corps to guard the Roman frontier. The opportunity for an attack was at once seized by a sophisticated German chief named Civilis, who had served in the Roman forces and had taken a Latin name. With the help of a disaffected Gallic chieftain Civilis carried the entire line of the Rhine to Basel and invited the adjacent German tribes to invade Gaul. The early collapse of the civil war and the arrival of Roman reinforcements soon put an end to Civilis' venture; but his initial success was ominous. During the next two centuries occasional unwise reductions of the Roman garrison invited new attacks. In A.D. 167 some raiders from the Middle Danube actually entered North-East Italy; in 213 and again in 234 similar forays were made into Gaul. But all these invasions were requited with interest as soon as the Roman forces were brought up to strength. Thus as late as A.D. 250 the West Europe frontier stood intact.

Meanwhile, however, the game of emperor-making had begun in good earnest, and one Roman frontier after another was left undermanned. In A.D. 251 the Goths, who at this period lay farthest east among the Germanic

peoples, carried the line of the Lower Danube and for twenty years overran the Balkan lands. In 259 the Alamanni of South-West Germany, advancing through Burgundy and through Tyrol, made a double incursion into Italy and reached Ravenna; in 268 they penetrated to Lake Garda; in 271 they again invaded as far as the Adriatic. Each of these offensives was broken up by a Roman counter-attack, and for more than a century to come Italy remained immune from serious incursions. But the gigantic ring-wall which the Emperor Aurelian constructed round Rome (c. A.D. 271) was (and still is) a visible symbol of the crumbling of the "pax Romana." In 256 the Franks from the lower Rhine crossed the length of Gaul, and for several years roamed at will in North-East Spain. Behind them the door of the Rhine was again closed by the Emperor Gallienus and a general named Postumus. But in 259 Postumus set up a virtually independent palatinate in Gaul, Spain and Britain, thus paving the way for the break up of Western Europe into a jumble of succession-states. Fortunately the new "Empire of the Gauls" had no time to strike roots. In 268 Postumus and three of his successors in turn were murdered by their own troops, and in 273 his dominions were recaptured by the Emperor Aurelian. Thanks to this ruler, who was deservedly called "the Restorer of the World," the danger of the Roman Empire breaking up like a sultanate into its pashaliks was definitely averted. But a new round of imperial murders in 275 brought the Franks and the Alamanni once more into the field, and with them two minor tribes, the Vandals and the Burgundians, who at this period were usually friendly to Rome. The invaders overran Gaul as far as Bordeaux and



captured no less than seventy cities. In 277 the Emperor Probus, a worthy successor of Aurelian, restored and re-fortified the line of the Rhine and Upper Danube, but abandoned the advanced zone beyond those rivers. About this time the Gallic towns hastily threw up defences which in the course of the fourth century gave way to carefully constructed ring-walls. Soon after A.D. 256 some of the Spanish cities—*e.g.*, Leon and Astorga—also fortified themselves. Henceforth Western Europe lived perpetually under the shadow of the Germanic invasions.

After the great crisis of A.D. 251-277 the Roman Empire enjoyed a century of comparative peace. The victories of Aurelian and Probus were supplemented by a series of military reforms. The lack of a central reserve by means of which a broken defence could be mended without drafting troops from other frontiers was made good by the Emperors Gallienus (A.D. 260-268) and Diocletian (A.D. 284-305), who raised a new mobile army to supplement the troops on the border. In the fourth century the emperors had frequent recourse to the homeopathic remedy of enlisting Germans against their own countrymen. This was a dangerous expedient, for the Germans when enrolled in the Roman forces aggravated the growing lack of discipline, and individual German chieftains in Roman employ, such as the Frank Arbogast, the Goth Alaric, and the Vandal Stilicho, were just as unscrupulous in the furtherance of their individual ambitions as the high Roman officers. But the experiment was quite successful in this sense, that the Germans remained as ready as ever to turn upon each other. On the whole, the German auxiliaries served Rome well, and some of their captains rose high in the confidence of the emperors.

Nevertheless the Empire did not recover from the strain of the third-century crisis; its pulse beat more slowly, and its capacity for effort became progressively less. Conversely the Germans for all their defeats had made sure that the Romans were no longer invincible, and remained ever ready to try their luck again.

Of the campaigns of the period A.D. 277-400 it will suffice to mention the more important. In 286 Carausius, the commander of the "classis Britannica" on the English Channel, set up a virtually independent rule in Britain; but in 296 his successor Allectus was defeated and killed by Diocletian's general Constantius Chlorus. Two years later Constantius heavily punished some Alamannic raiders in Eastern Gaul. In 306 his son, the future Emperor Constantine, repelled the Franks and made the last big counter-raid into North-West Germany. In 355 the Franks and Alamanni, aided by Saxons from the North Sea, captured no less than forty Gallic towns; but shortly afterwards another emperor-to-be named Julian restored the frontier line and inflicted a severe defeat on the Alamanni at Strashourg. In 369 the Emperor Valentinian I. once more showed the Roman arms in the Neckar Valley. For thirty years Roman prestige was so far restored that the Germans made no important move during the next round of civil wars between Roman generals (A.D. 383-392), in the course of which the commander of Britain, Magnus Maximus, carried all Western Europe, but was eventually defeated and killed by the Emperor Theodosius I.

With the fifth began a new series of invasions which finally broke down the Roman frontiers. The attack was now opened by the Goths, an East German people who



had been moving westward under pressure from the Huns and in 378 had won a memorable victory over the Emperor Valens at Adrianople. Their principal chieftain, Alaric, had been appointed commander of the Roman forces in Illyricum (on the north-eastern border of Italy), but repeatedly quarrelled with the Emperor Honorius, and was always relapsing into his native habits of plunder. In 402 Alaric overran Lombardy, and after being cornered by a rival German general, the Vandal Stilicho, was allowed by the latter to escape. In 405 a motley host under another Goth named Radagaesus actually crossed the Apennines, but was destroyed near Florence by Stilicho, who cleverly starved it into surrender. But the death of Stilicho, who presently fell a victim to a palace intrigue, left Italy without a competent defender. In 408, Alaric advanced upon Rome itself and laid it under siege. For the time being he was bought off with a heavy danegeld, but in 410, after a renewed siege, he put the city to sack. Soon after this exploit Alaric died, and his Goths evacuated Italy, which now gained a respite of some forty years from invasion. But the fall of Rome had a profound moral effect, despite the fact that the city had ceased to be the capital of the Empire, for the legend of "Roma æterna" had been shattered.

In the meantime the defence of the western provinces definitely gave way. To meet the menace of Alaric, Stilicho depleted the garrisons of Britain and Gaul. A further denudation of the frontier took place in 406, when a usurper named Constantine removed most if not all of the remaining troops in Britain and invaded Gaul with these. Constantine in the first instance carried Gaul and Spain, but in 409 was in turn betrayed by a lieutenant

named Gerontius. The dissension between the rebels enabled the loyal general Constantius to suppress both and to recover Southern France. But Britain henceforth was as good as lost to the Roman Empire; it may have received occasional help from stray Roman generals in Gaul, yet in effect it had regained an unwelcome independence. But this is not the full measure of the mischief caused by Alaric and Constantine. Left practically undefended, the Rhine frontier was swamped by a double wave of invasions. The advanced line of assailants consisted of Suevi and Vandals, and a non-German tribe, the Alans; in their wake followed the Franks, Alamanni, and Burgundians. The Suevi, Vandals and Alans passed through France into Spain, which became the scene of a confused warfare. In 412 Alaric's successor Ataulf was enlisted by Roman diplomacy against the invaders of Spain and drove them westward and southward. In 419 the Goths moved into South-West France, where they settled down as Roman allies; but of the remaining Germans the Vandals were attacked by their former confederates the Suevi, and in 429 passed on from Spain into Africa. Thus while the Suevi lingered on in Spain, the Romans recovered the eastern part for some further fifty years.

While the Goths occupied South-Western Gaul, the Franks took permanent possession of the North. In Central France the Romans retained a precarious hold until the later part of the fifth century.

In A.D. 450 widespread alarm was created in Western Europe by an invasion of the Hun monarch Attila. Hitherto the Hunnish tribes, which had temporarily settled in Hungary, had been on fairly amicable terms with the Romans. Their lesser chieftains enlisted in the



Roman army and rendered useful service with their excellent light horse. In 436 Attila, who had meanwhile united all the Hun tribes and had subdued the East German peoples, obliged the Romans by destroying the Burgundian capital at Worms, an episode immortalised in the *Nibelungenlied*. But in 450 Attila quarrelled with the Roman Emperor Valentinian III. and overran Gaul as far as the Loire. Fortunately for the Romans the Franks and the Goths now settled in Gaul sided with them, and combined forces under Aëtius, "the last of the Romans." The coalition headed Attila off Orleans and after a running battle near Troyes ushered him out of France. In 452 Attila made an unexpected descent upon Northern Italy, causing great havoc as he went, but he presently made an equally unexpected retreat. He died shortly after, and the Hun peril with him.

But the Romans were unable to profit by Attila's failure. In 454 the Emperor Valentinian III. requited Aëtius by murdering him with his own hand, and so deprived himself of his only capable general. In 455 the Vandal Gaiseric, who had established a kingdom in North Africa, built a fleet and repeated Alaric's exploit by a second and more systematic sack of Rome. About the same time the Alamanni definitely took possession of Switzerland, and the Burgundians, who had migrated with Roman permission into Savoy, declared their independence. By A.D. 455 the final disintegration of the Roman Empire in the West was in sight. It only remained for the Gothic king Euric to expel the last Roman garrisons from South-East Gaul (A.D. 470-480), for the Franks under Clovis to descend to the Loire (480-490), and for a mutinous leader of auxiliary troops named Odoacer to

depose the last puppet emperor at Ravenna and to convert Italy into the youngest of the Germanic succession-states (A.D. 476).

Thus towards the middle of the fifth century the Roman Empire definitely disappeared from Western Europe. In the lands thus permanently surrendered to them German kings now take over, and by passing perforce from a policy of plunder to one of conquest and reorganisation, open a new epoch in the political history of the West.

## CHAPTER VII

### *THE GROWTH OF ABSOLUTISM*

IN the third, fourth and fifth centuries A.D. the Roman Empire not only underwent great changes in the extent of its territory, but witnessed far-reaching alterations in its methods of administration. During the previous two centuries there had been gradual encroachments by the emperors on the remaining functions of the Senate and the old republican executive, but the outlines of Augustus' quasi-republican constitution remained unchanged. After A.D. 200 the Roman Empire made more rapid strides towards complete absolutism. The old republican magistracies were by degrees abolished or converted into merely honorary charges. A more important change was rendered necessary by the great invasions of mid-third century, when the more central provinces passed from the control of the Senate to that of the emperors, who alone could give them military protection. By this transfer the Senate was deprived of its one remaining hold on the administration. One important electoral right, the formal appoint-



ment of each new emperor, was left in its hands; but this *cong  d' lire* conferred no right of actual choice. So long as the Roman Empire in the West lasted, the Senate continued to hold sessions, but by the end of the third century it had been shorn of all practical importance and was mainly concerned to cultivate its own dignity.

Another important change took place in the position of the self-governing municipalities. As the famous "election posters" at Pompeii show, interest in municipal politics still ran high in the first century A.D. In the second century the emperors occasionally found it necessary to send special auditors to disallow extravagant expenditure, but in general municipal administration appears to have remained efficient, and to have suffered little interference. In the third and subsequent centuries, without any deliberate change in imperial policy, local self-government in the Roman Empire dwindled to a mere shadow. The main cause of this change is to be found in the progressive impoverishment of the Empire (on which see Chapter VIII.). So long as times remained good, there was little difficulty in finding competent persons willing to "pay their footing" as municipal grandees, and to shoulder the slight risks of a surcharge in case the taxes which they had to collect on behalf of the imperial exchequer should fall short of the requisite amount. But amidst the growing poverty of the later centuries the burden of the imperial surcharge and of the customary local largesse grew intolerable, and enrolment in the municipal senates, from being a prize, almost became a punishment. To remedy the consequent dearth of candidates the emperors imposed membership of the local senates as a hereditary duty upon certain families. By this device a skeleton

organisation was kept up, but the unwilling conscripts in the municipal service of course scamped their work as much as possible. By the fifth century the self-governing activities of the towns had been reduced to a minimum, and the reservoir of administrative ability in the municipalities was drained away.

Thus in the third, fourth and fifth centuries political power became completely concentrated in the hands of the emperors and their officials. In theory the emperors still wielded the same quasi-republican prerogatives as in the first century, and formally they still received these prerogatives from the Senate. In fact they were left without any concurrent authority in any branch of the government. The making and interpreting of law now rested entirely with them, and the extensive remodelling and amplification of the Roman codes which took place at this period was wholly the work of their legal advisers. Above all, the whole machinery of administration, both military and also civil, was now controlled by imperial officials. Moreover the emperors no longer were content with the mere substance of power. Towards the end of the third century Aurelian and Diocletian did away with the lingering outward forms of republicanism by adopting an elaborate Oriental etiquette at their court.

One further breach with republican tradition remained to be made. In A.D. 330 the Emperor Constantine transferred the seat of government to Constantinople, as being the best centre for watching the then most critical frontiers, the Danube and the Euphrates. It is true that from 365 a collateral emperor was appointed to supervise the western countries. But the western emperor was usually subordinate to the ruler at Constantinople, and



he set up his court, not at Rome, but at Milan or (since A.D. 402) at Ravenna. Rome retained its Senate, but ceased to be a seat of administration.

But if the autocracy of the later emperors was subject to no constitutional checks, it was hampered and even paralysed by the self-willed attitude of its own executive. The very existence of the rulers was threatened by the chronic insubordination of the Roman armies; their authority was flouted by the equally persistent disobedience of their administrative staff. This staff, whose numerical increase had more than kept pace with the progressive extension of the imperial functions, eventually grew too large for effective supervision. It also became more and more highly organised. Contrary to the usual practice of ancient states, which allowed a free interchange between civilian and military duties, its members were confined to a purely civilian career. By this process the executive departments achieved great solidarity, and in their collective strength outmatched the emperors, who in any case could not spare much time from the now incessant calls of frontier defence. Thus the emperors' subordinates ended by becoming their own masters. Of all the changes in the later Roman government, this was the greatest and worst. From being strictly responsible, the bureaucracy became free to misgovern to its heart's content, and it made full use of its licence. All the usual complaints about a corrupt administration were made against it, sale of offices and of justice, blackmail and illegal exaction of taxes, punishments with or without semblance of trial. It is only fair to add that the emperors again and again strove to recall their staff to better behaviour. They showered edict after edict upon them, imploring and

threatening in turn; they established special corps of inspectors to single out the offenders. But their honest endeavours were defeated by the well-organised collusion of the staff. The edicts were quietly disregarded, the inspectors were hoodwinked or bribed. Thus there was nothing left for the subjects but to await the coming of the German kings, whom they accepted with equanimity or even with alacrity.

But the bureaucracy found its power limited by two other classes with co-ordinate privileges. The landlords of the ever-growing latifundia were converting their estates into self-contained units, both in an economic and in a political sense. By degrees they acquired the right to levy the taxes and to supervise the levies of recruits incident upon their estates, and it is probable that they also usurped jurisdiction. Eventually the big domains came to form states within the state, and were practically out of bounds for the imperial officials. In this respect they foreshadow the medieval manor.

Another practical check upon the bureaucracy was provided by the Christian clergy. In the fourth and fifth centuries, when Christianity had become the state religion, the clergy were officially authorised to exercise the disciplinary powers and the arbitral jurisdiction which their congregations had unofficially confided to them. In addition, the bishops of the Roman cities were enlisted by the emperors to protect their communities against the depredations of the executive. In effect, the Christian prelates sometimes brought their moral authority to bear with success upon both sets of plunderers, Roman officials and German invaders. In the establishment of the Christian clergy as a privileged order and the activity of the bishops



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as chief representatives and champions of their towns, we find another link between the later Roman Empire and the medieval states of Europe.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *THE DECLINE OF MATERIAL WELFARE*

IN the first two centuries A.D. the general level of prosperity in Western Europe stood higher than ever before. But this material welfare did not rest, like that of modern times, on geographic discoveries or on scientific inventions; it was chiefly due to a political and military factor, the "pax Romana." The Germanic invasions therefore could not fail to have a disastrous effect on economic conditions; not only did they entail destruction of property, but they dispelled the sense of security which had been the mainspring of economic activity.

Not that the invasions were the sole cause of impoverishment. The Roman Government contributed to the result by mistakes in finance. To the long-standing abuse of indiscriminate doles to the Roman proletariat they added other unnecessary drains upon the public purse, Oriental pomp at their court, an overgrown executive with an inflated salary roll, frequent payments of blackmail to mutinous troops or to greedy neighbours across the frontier. They aggravated the burden of increasing imposts by faulty administration. Under the Republic and the early emperors taxation was fairly well distributed between each economic group, it was levied at regular intervals, and it was paid almost wholly in money. Under the later emperors a new method of assessment

gave an advantage to the owners of large undercropped domains over the smaller proprietors who practised intensive cultivation. For lack of sufficient cash reserves, or of an adequate system of raising loans, the government could only meet sudden calls for increased expenditure by heavy excess imposts, which were in effect a raid upon working capital. To save themselves trouble, officials fell back upon requisitions in kind and the conscription of labour, which in the nature of things could not be assessed equably. Lastly, the emperors of the third century produced economic chaos by a rapid depreciation of their gold and silver coinage. Under the Republic Roman money had almost always been honest, and in the first two centuries A.D. nothing worse had happened than occasional slight reductions of weight which did not impair public confidence. But about A.D. 250 the deterioration in the weight and quality of the coins was so sharp as to produce many of the effects which inflation by paper issues has recently caused in Europe. Prices rose by leaps and bounds, and the mechanism of exchange was so far thrown out of gear that a makeshift system of payment in kind had to be improvised. Under Diocletian and Constantine the currency was again stabilised, and to Diocletian was due one belated reform, by which Italy lost its no longer justifiable immunity from direct taxation. But even so taxation remained on balance heavier and more vexatious than under the earlier emperors. Moreover, the taxpayers were being forced to pay all manner of illegal exactions over and above the authorised impositions. The complaints against fiscal rapacity which now filled the air were amply justified: the administration was eating away reserves and retarding fresh production.



Among the symptoms of economic decline decreased cultivation of the land was for a time at least the most alarming. There is evidence of land left derelict, not only in the war zones, but even in such sheltered and fertile districts as Campania (near Naples). But it is probable that much of the damage to agriculture was not permanent. The Germanic invaders, having discovered that by indiscriminate devastation they endangered their own food supplies, devised orderly schemes of requisition, and eventually settled down on the conquered land as cultivators. It is doubtful therefore whether in the long run food production was seriously diminished. The principal agrarian change under the later Roman emperors probably lay in a new distribution of ownership. The smaller proprietors, who were hardest hit both by the German and by the official Roman plunderers, found themselves reduced to becoming tenants under the wealthier landlords, who had means to tide over a crisis and were ever ready to buy up their less fortunate neighbours. This process of concentration was indeed partly counteracted by the formation of new allotments which the government made to its soldiers, both to the regulars and to the German auxiliaries. Yet under the later emperors the typical agricultural unit was an estate embracing a few thousand acres, whose proprietor lived in affluence amid the general poverty and exercised a quasi-official power over his tenants. The authority of the landlords was further strengthened by a series of imperial enactments of the third and fourth centuries, by which their free labourers were tied down to the soil. The steps by which the free tenants were converted into serfs are not yet wholly clear, but it appears that the landlords carried their point by a

chain of gradual encroachments on the tenants' rights, thus presenting the government with an accomplished fact which the latter somewhat weakly sanctioned with *ex post facto* legislation. In any case, the ultimate relations of landlord and tenant on the large estates bore a strong resemblance—shall we say the likeness of father to son?—to those which obtained on medieval manors.

The economic effect of faulty finance and foreign invasions asserted itself in a more permanent form upon the craftsmen and traders. The loss occasioned by the German inroads resulted not merely from their direct damage, but more especially from the reversion to a more self-contained economy which the growing insecurity of intercourse imposed upon Western Europe. Where each town and each large estate separated off into an isolated unit, little scope was left for that wholesale long-distance trade in articles of everyday use which had been the distinguishing feature of previous centuries. This change of habits involved a decay of craftsmanship which is one of the most conspicuous marks of the third and subsequent centuries. A partial exception to this rule is furnished by the building industry, which still benefited by imperial patronage. The baths of Diocletian at Rome, his palace at Spalato, and the remarkable group of mausoleums and churches which the last Roman and the first Gothic rulers of Italy set up at Ravenna, are visible remains of surviving skill in architectural craft. But the specimens of industrial art from the third and later centuries are significantly few and poor. The decline of industry and commerce is also illustrated by the growing scarcity of enterprise and skilled labour, which threatened even the essential crafts and trades with extinction. To maintain the supply of



weapons and uniforms for the army, the emperors had to establish state armouries and textile factories. To avert famine at Rome, they bound down the members of the bakers' and shippers' guilds to remain at their existing occupations and to apprentice their sons to the same callings. It is not known how far this serfdom was extended to other industries and trades; but its imposition on such a comparatively elementary business as baking suggests a really desperate shortage of trained labour.

On the other side of the account it may be claimed that an actual improvement in economic conditions was brought about by the concomitant decay of slavery, which became a luxury beyond the reach of most. It may also be contended that the labouring class, which had not obtained its fair share of the previous prosperity, had little to lose in the general impoverishment. But a society which had lost its skilled craftsmen and its enterprising bourgeoisie, and retained little else but large landlords and their serfs, could not maintain the standard of wealth or the freedom of intercourse which are essential to a high civilisation. On economic grounds alone, to mention no others, Western Europe was bound to relapse into a Dark Age.

## CHAPTER IX

### *THE DECLINE OF CULTURE*

WE have already noticed (Chapter IV.) that Roman culture at the beginning of the Christian era was running to seed, and that its wide diffusion in Western Europe, where it imposed itself *en bloc*, failed to produce any vigorous

hybrid growths. Unlike other civilisations which have been invigorated by a period of storm and stress, that of the western Roman Empire had become too stereotyped to adapt itself to any big change of environment; and the changes brought by the events of later Roman history were all for the worse. The economic decline, as we have seen, was in itself fatal to the survival of a high civilisation. Besides, the decay of city life which accompanied the economic relapse had a serious reaction on Roman culture, for this culture was essentially town-bred, and depended on the stimulus which the political excitement, the commercial activity, and the brisk social intercourse of the municipalities alone could provide. The repeopling of Western Europe with Germanic newcomers also had a detrimental effect, at least for the time being. Not that the Germans were impervious to Roman civilisation. The very chieftains who set out to plunder the Roman world fell under its spell and began to adopt its customs. Ataulf the Goth married a Roman princess (Galla Placidia, daughter of the Emperor Honorius); Stilicho the Vandal became a patron of Roman literature. Indeed in all the countries which they occupied, except Britain, the Germans were eventually absorbed by the native element. On the other hand, the invaders did little to rejuvenate the moribund Roman world, for they were not long in shedding their barbarian vigour with their other primitive qualities. The only notable exception to this rule is provided by the Normans, who came last. Besides, the Germans arrived in numbers too great for immediate assimilation. Thus the first effect of their invasions was to dilute still further the anaemic culture of the Roman Empire in the West.



The brightest spot in this gloomy picture lies in the solicitude shown by some of the emperors and municipal government on behalf of the schools. It is strange to hear of rulers of the later third and fourth centuries, men of the camp who could quite plausibly have pleaded the general poverty of the times as an excuse for lopping expenditure on education, nevertheless keeping up their contributions to schools and exhorting the cities to do likewise. The torch of learning was also upheld by the Christian clergy. It is true that on the question of mundane knowledge the churchmen held divergent views, but in general their attitude was not unfriendly, and individual prelates in the West, notably Sidonius Apollinaris of Clermont (A.D. 450) and Isidore of Seville (A.D. 600), were among the foremost scholars or writers of their day. Under these conditions the study of Latin literature was kept alive in a number of centres, of which Bordeaux was the most distinguished. In the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries letter-writing and the minor branches of poetry were still cultivated with success, and serious new contributions to Latin literature were made by the panegyrist Claudian (A.D. 400) and the historian Ammianus Marcellinus (A.D. 375). These two authors, curiously enough, were Levantines who took up their abode in Italy.

Yet the surviving centres of learning were but islands in a rising tide of barbarism. Even among scholars a knowledge of Greek, which before A.D. 200 had been widely diffused in the West, was slipping out of use; in mid-fifth century it had become a very rare accomplishment. Moreover, while the scholars kept up the tradition of pure Ciceronianism, the less highly educated allowed their Latin to degenerate into mere patois, in which

grammar and syntax were more or less ignored, and pronunciation was denatured with all manner of slurs and twists. By A.D. 450 written Latin was living on as a universal tongue of the learned, but spoken Latin was practically defunct, having been resolved into the diverse local jargons out of which the Romance languages eventually emerged.

The third and following centuries also witnessed the death of classical art in Western Europe. This was a natural consequence of the decay of craftsmanship which we have mentioned in the previous chapter. A partial exception to this rule is offered by the native British pottery, which began about A.D. 250 to replace the failing imports from Gaul. On this "Castor ware" the decorative patterns of scrolls and racing animals reveal a new realism. But the promise of this native British was never fulfilled, and in any case it was an isolated phenomenon.

A more serious symptom of decline lay in the general loss of mental vigour which characterised the later centuries of Roman history. Even among the learned and the highly placed there was a progressive decay of the critical faculties. The superstitions which formerly had been relegated to the back-alleys gradually recovered possession of the courts and of the academies. Not only alchemy and astrology, with their colourable imitations of genuine science, but crude beliefs in omens and magic returned into fashion.

Worst of all was the spread of apathy and fatalism, in which we may find the clearest proof of the senile decay that overtook Western Europe. At a time when Christianity was making rapid strides the general lack of a hopeful and courageous outlook on this world, as on



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the next, may appear surprising. Yet, explain it how we may, by causes of a physical order, by long-standing habits of political subjection, by a sense of failure arising out of the Germanic invasions, or by any other reason, the fact stands clear that Western Europe had lost the will-power which was the first condition of its own revival. In more recent times Western Europe has successfully emerged from trials greater than the Germanic invasions, from the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and from the Armageddon of 1914-1918; but on these occasions it had the necessary reserves of self-reliance and of the will-to-recover. In the later days of the Roman Empire it fell into pieces, because it could not or would not pull itself together. f

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